

February 28, 2023

Chairs and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Katherine Villeda, and I am a Resident from Bridgeport. I am a member of CT Students for a Dream and growing up, my parents were undocumented. Professionally, I am a policy analyst where my work primarily focuses on providing support to state advocates across the country working towards health care coverage for residents in their states regardless of their immigration status.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 6659: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, with respect to the budgets of the human services agencies, specifically for the Department of Social Services, which administers HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP).

There are important priorities being funded in the Governor's Budget for human services agencies, but this budget doesn't include sufficient funding to invest in all that the people of Connecticut need for a thriving state – such as public education, nonprofit services, affordable housing, and health care. Absent from the budget, for example, is extending HUSKY up to age 26 for those who are income-eligible, regardless of immigration status.

Connecticut can afford the implementation of this coverage. The HUSKY 4 Immigrants coalition has estimated this would cost roughly \$18.4 million and cover about 5,000 young people who are currently living without access to health insurance. The Department of Social Services has estimated the cost to be at least \$15 million. Hospitals would save money on uncompensated care and the state would save money on reduced Emergency Medicaid spending.

The policies passed in 2021 and 2022 are working – over 2,000 undocumented children ages 0-12 have already enrolled in HUSKY since the 1st of the year (when the program started), and last year over 1,600 undocumented pregnant people accessed critical prenatal services. We can continue this progress by expanding to age 26.

A state's budget is a testimony to our values. Governor Lamont frequently states that Connecticut is the most family-friendly state in the country. Though there are many reasons Governor Lamont can proudly claim that, please do not let that be a distraction to the reality that we have left some of our residents behind. Connecticut cannot truly be the most family-friendly state if we do not include and ensure equitable access to services for our immigrant families, neighbors and colleagues.

I hope the Committee, in partnership with the Governor and the rest of the legislature, includes funding to extend HUSKY up to age 26 for those who are income-eligible, regardless of immigration status.

Thank you for your consideration.
Katherine Villeda
Bridgeport, CT